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A
S E R M O N

Preached at the

A S S I Z E S

HELD AT

BUCKINGHAM,

Before the Right Honourable

Sir *CHARLES PRATT,*

Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas,

A N D

Mr. Serjeant *SAYER,*

On *Tuesday, July 31, 1764.*

By *WILLIAM PUGH*, Vicar of Totternhoe, and
Curate of Aylesbury. *~ F*

Published at the Request of the HIGH SHERIFF, and of
the GENTLEMEN of the GRAND JURY.

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M D C C L X V.

A

SERMON

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ASSIZES



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Before the Right Honourable

SIR CHARLES PRATT,

Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas;

AND

MR. SERJEANT SAUER,

On Tuesday, July 30, 1764.

By WILLIAM BUCH, Vicar of Tottenham, and
Curate of Aylebury.

Published at the Request of the High Sheriff, and of
the Grand Jurors of the County of Middlesex.

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with

and protection, that their kings were appointed by him, and some of them for the greater benefit of the state, raised nations loyally to that office. The Jews therefore having been formerly, as to

ROMANS xiii. 4

He is the minister of God to thee for good.

THE Christian converts, whom St. Paul exhorts in this chapter to obey the civil magistrate, were Jews and Gentiles, who in all probability were, both of them, unwilling to submit to the Roman government.

The Jewish part of these converts must be naturally averse to such a subjection, and might persuade themselves perhaps, that conscience did not bind them to obey a heathen power, since God himself had given them under their former dispensation a code of laws, and condescended to be as their monarch; and though they were deprived of these high privileges through their perverseness and rebellion, they continued even after this to be so much under his peculiar care

and protection, that their kings were appointed by him, and some of them, for the greater benefit of the state, raised miraculously to that office. The Jews therefore having been so eminently distinguished, as to have their whole civil constitution settled by him, who is most intimately acquainted with the nature of man, can we wonder that these converts should be strongly prejudiced against a government, which had no pretensions to such evident marks of God's particular favour and providence?

And as to the Gentile converts, may we not suppose that those amongst them, who had diligently perused the scriptures of the Old Testament, in order to examine the types and prophecies relating to the Saviour of the world, and had thereby discovered the Jewish mode of government to be the express ordinance of God, might expect to be favoured themselves likewise with some such privileges, as professing a religion proved incontestably to be from God by undeniable miracles, and might therefore on that account be tempted to

to think that submission to the Roman power was no part of their duty?

But St. Paul prevents both the Jew and the Gentile from making any such pleas, by requiring their subjection to *the powers that be*, that is, the Roman government, in as strong terms as he could have demanded it to the Jewish in their most flourishing state, and for the same reason, because *there is no power but of God*; by which he intimates, that the Roman magistrates, and all other rulers, who *are not a terror to good works, but to the evil*, derive their authority from the same divine fountain, as the Jews did; and accordingly he declares to them, *Whosoever therefore resisteth the power*, that is, the government they then lived under, *resisteth the ordinance of God*.

And what the apostle enforces here with so much earnestness on these converts, is so evidently the duty of all mankind in every age and country, that we must be convinced by our reason of the truth and necessity of this doctrine, though there was no revelation to

to confirm it, for thus, we may justly argue.
 —In a state of nature there would be nothing to restrain us from acts of the greatest violence and oppression, but the rule of right; and how little that rule would operate on the minds of men in general, we have melancholy experience. From the turbulence of the passions, under no control from without, would proceed every thing that is shocking and terrible to human nature. Now to deliver mankind, as much as possible, from the evils of so dreadful a situation, there was some method to be found, that would more effectually restrain the conduct of the unruly, and better enforce the general practice of justice, and of all the social virtues. The wisdom of man could devise no other method, to obtain this desirable end, but by establishing civil government; but to prevent or lessen the miseries of mankind, by removing the detestable and fruitful cause, open wickedness and vice, is so perfectly agreeable to our natural notions of a gracious Creator, and so worthy of God, that we must conclude, that the establishment of civil government, the only possible method of obtaining this

this end, must be his original will and appointment.

That natural disposition also to a social life, which can never exist in any degree of perfection without a governing power, and the numberless advantages arising from it, such as the improvement of our understanding, the regulating and becalming our passions, and the invention of the arts, which minister so largely to the conveniences of life, must all lead to the same conclusion, because we must consider that impulse, or natural disposition as the law of God, to procure us those inestimable advantages.

Thus it evidently appears, not only from the apostle's express declaration, but also from the nature of God, and the well known disposition of man to a social life, implanted in him by his great Creator, that civil government, so absolutely necessary to make men happy, is no less than the gracious scheme of Providence. And from the same principles of reason we may likewise infer, that the office and authority of the civil magistrate

in his executive capacity, belong to him as the minister of God, to enforce obedience to the decrees and statutes of the community. This reasoning will be found to correspond exactly with the apostle's doctrine, *There is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God; whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; for rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.* It is to the magistrate we owe, that commutative justice is upheld, that property is made secure, and that every man sits easy and undisturbed under his own vine, and under his own fig tree. *Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, that is, obey the laws of your country, and thou shalt have praise of the same; for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, that is, transgress the laws of that community of which thou art a member, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath on him that doth evil.* And St. Peter's advice founded on the same principle is, *submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake,*
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whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him, for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well.

It is worthy of observation, that St. Paul considers government as the ordinance of God, but St. Peter as the ordinance of man. One calls it the ordinance of God, because God has so constituted the world, that it stands in need of the subserviency of government; the other calls it the ordinance of man, because God having prescribed no particular mode of government to be universally observed, every nation is at ~~the~~ liberty to chuse for themselves that form which they apprehend to be most suitable to the genius of the people, and to the circumstances of the country.

Government then in general is God's ordinance, because whatever he has made necessary must be so, and all the several species of government become his ordinances, when the main end proposed by them is the good of the people. It is in this view of the matter

ter that we are to understand St. Paul's exhortation to obedience ; for let the form or constitution of government be what it will, if the civil magistrate is *the minister of God to us for good*, it is our duty to obey him.

It will appear that government is so necessary to the wellbeing of the world, that there is some benefit derived from the worst kinds of it. Tyrannies could not subsist, if all concern for the subject was excluded, and no protection given. Irregularities are punished, and order and discipline kept up under the most despotic princes ; and therefore as far as the public good is pursued, so far even tyrants are to be obeyed. What a lesson of obedience does this afford us, whose happiness it is to be free from the nature of our government ! We cannot disobey, without acting the most absurd and inconsistent part, for we must disobey laws which are calculated for the security of our lives and properties, laws which we ourselves have consented to the enacting of : We cannot disobey, without hurting our own interest, without hurting the interest of the community, and without being rebels to our king,

king, for obedience to the laws is the test of true loyalty.

It is evident from the very ends of establishing society, that all its advantages must arise from obedience to the rules enjoined by it; for if they come to be disregarded, virtue will receive no encouragement, and vice no checks, and consequently no real benefits can possibly accrue from the establishment of society; every one will then be at liberty to follow the bent of his own inclinations, and to *do that which is right in his own eyes*, and therefore iniquity of every kind must abound; the enjoyment of the acquisitions of virtuous industry will be very precarious, and the possession of all property, and even life itself, very insecure, as “strength only will be the law of justice,” and in such a case the little chance the just and upright could have for mere safety would be from melancholy solitude, with the pitiful subsistence of bare necessities. Thus we see, disobedience to the laws manifestly tends to the dissolution of society.

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Here then we must look up to the magistrate as to a guardian angel, that watches over us to defend the community from every evil that threatens, and to preserve it in a happy and flourishing state, which can be no other way effected than by a proper exertion of his authority, imparting thereby force and vigour to the laws, which though ever so salutary, if they are not duly executed, become a dead letter; for when reason, which should direct our steps, loses its influence, and is no longer the rule of life, human laws, however well framed and intended, will have no weight but what they derive from the sanction of punishments.

How great and difficult a task is this laid on the magistrate! a task of such vast importance, that it requires the greatest fidelity, and will employ all his attention; for he is called upon in virtue of it, to use his utmost endeavours to restrain the overflowings of vice and ungodliness, to give protection to innocence and virtue, to decide controversies by an equal and impartial administration of justice, and thereby to put an end to all
strife,

strife, and promote universal love and harmony, the strongest bond of society, these blessings (the greatest we can receive from man) are the blessings we receive from the hands of the upright magistrate.

Benefits so invaluable, which give us the true relish for life and every enjoyment, must endear to us the just and good magistrate, and make us consider him in the most honoured character of a tender and affectionate father, that is always attentive to our concerns. And can persons of an ingenuous mind do less, in return for so much earnest solicitude and watchful care, than contribute all in their power to make his burden as light as possible, by scrupulously obeying the laws themselves, and by promoting the observance of them in others, as far as their power and influence extend?

But this is not all that may be justly expected from us; we cannot have a due sense of the blessings conveyed to us by the interposition of magistrates, without shewing every instance of respect, honour and reverence

rence to the authors of our happiness. And what gratitude requires of us, we shall find it is our interest to do; for, as we are all concerned that vice and immorality should be put out of countenance, and virtue and good manners should gain ground and flourish in the world, the more we contribute to raise the reputation of the magistrate, and to bring him into esteem, the more we increase his influence, and strengthen his hands to carry on the great work he is engaged in.

It has been already shewn, how natural and revealed religion both conspire to prove the necessity of a governing power. This truth was so far discoverable by the mere light of nature, that we do not find the most barbarous people were totally without government, for they acknowledged submission to the heads of their tribes, who were set apart to keep the public peace, and to punish open violations of natural justice. But revelation clears and brightens our view of this as well as of all other duties, by removing all doubts and dispelling every cloud that might obscure the authority of *the higher powers*; for it

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expressly requires us to obey magistrates as *the ministers of God*, not only for the happiness we enjoy by their means, *not only for wrath*, for fear of their terrors, *but also for conscience sake*, as what we shall be accountable for at the great day, when the inmost secrets and real dispositions of all hearts shall be disclosed, *not with eye-service as men pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.*

If grateful returns and a cheerful submission are due to governors for the security with which we enjoy the many comforts and conveniences of this life, surely our duty rises higher, we become bound in the greatest penalty to obedience, when we consider how instrumental they are in affording us the means to obtain a better state hereafter, free from all the evils both natural and moral, to which this is subject; for we are much indebted to their authority for the safe possession of the invaluable treasures of that revelation, which gives us this comfortable and noble prospect, for the great advantage of a standing ministry, and the high privilege of

worshipping God according to the declarations of his will, in short for the maintenance of God's true religion in the world.

Every one must be naturally led to cast his eyes around him, and to examine what correspondence there is between these lines of duty and our conduct and practice; and every friend to his country must be deeply affected, if he sees just grounds for the observation that has been long made, that a contempt of authority, and a general want of deference to superiors, characterize this nation; because they are the strongest symptoms of weakness and decay in the political system, and without proper restoratives must bring on its dissolution; liberty when running into licentiousness being like a rich cordial drunk immoderately, which intoxicates the brain, injures the best constitution, and will at length utterly ruin it.

This contempt of authority, and want of deference to superiors, I fear too justly complained of, must be ascribed principally to that disregard for every thing of a sacred and
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religious nature, which has spread itself far and wide through all orders and degrees of men; for the fear of man can have but little influence, where there is little or no fear of God.

The meek and humble disciple of Christ will always be disposed to obey those that are set over him, and to esteem them highly; but if religion is once set aside, all sense of regard to authority must be at an end, because religion consists in recognising that great Being whose will alone creates obligation, and who is therefore the fountain of all authority. And when religion has once quitted its hold of the heart, pride and a spirit of independence take immediately an entire possession thereof, which will not suffer us to acknowledge any superior, and consequently we can think there is no deference due from us, though we might be easily persuaded that it is due to us. Thus religion is clearly the great support of all rule and of all authority.

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If we were to inquire, where that disregard or at least indifference to religion, now every where visible, first began, we might perhaps trace it up to those orders of men, who of all the members of society were most interested to countenance religion, those I mean who were placed by Providence in the highest stations, many of whom, in one capacity or other, acted in the character of, what they ought to have been, the ministers of God for public good.

The lower ranks of life, who have neither leisure nor abilities in deep researches to form a judgment for themselves, will be naturally determined by that of those who are their superiors in understanding as well as in fortune, and from a vanity of aiming to assimilate themselves with those above them, will be so much the more disposed to think and act as their superiors do. This points out to persons in distinguished stations the great prudence of embracing principles of sound policy, and how necessary it is to support the cause of Christianity, as the only reli-

religion in the world that inculcates such principles in so perfect a manner.

It is manifest that government is more effectually maintained with the aid of religion. Human laws cannot concern themselves with the springs of action, they can look no farther than the overt act; but religion does not stop there, its business is with the heart, and when that fountain is purified, there can no polluted stream flow from it. Religion then is by all means to be secured on the side of government; prophaness and irreligion should be punished as well as vice and immorality, and every encouragement given to piety as well as to virtue, the most effectual method that can be taken to promote the interest of society. The magistrate thus interesting himself in the cause of religion acts as the minister of God for the good of mankind.

The duties of subordinate magistrates should be as faithfully discharged as those of the supreme, their authority carrying the same obligation, as they are his delegates or

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representatives; and therefore every magistrate, from the highest to the lowest, must be equally accountable to God for the exercise of the power intrusted to him.

All who are invested with any authority, are therefore most strictly bound to give all diligence in reclaiming offenders by advice, reproof and correction; and they ought to consider seriously, that in case of supineness and neglect on their part, they not only sin themselves, but become partakers of other mens sins. Their examples should be *burning and shining lights* to direct the people under their care in the ways of religion and virtue. Bad examples from persons in authority and of superior rank are too successful in propagating vice; and it is a melancholy truth that good ones are not so powerful in promoting virtue. The bias of mankind is generally on the wrong side; the bad example joining its power with this bias, acts with great force, but the good one being in direct opposition to it, loses much of its power.

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The magistrate is engaged in the same cause with the ministers of the gospel, the cause of virtue and of happiness both here and hereafter; and by a faithful discharge of their respective offices, they mutually lighten each other's burden. The magistrate, by holding out the terrors of the law, facilitates the business of those who exhort obedience to the rules of the gospel, and the dictates of conscience; and the ministers of the gospel, by inculcating the practice of all Christian virtues, must contribute to lessen the harsh and unpleasing business of the dispensers of distributive justice.

This visible connection between these two offices was probably the reason, that in the first ages of the world the supreme magistracy and the priesthood often met in the same person.

If we attend to the dignity of the magistrate's office, and its consequence to the happiness of man, we cannot wonder at the severity of that judgment denounced against the abusers of so high and important a trust,
Because

Because being ministers of his kingdom you have not judged aright, nor kept the law, nor walked after the counsel of God, horribly and speedily shall he come upon you, for a sharp judgment shall be to them in high places, for mercy will soon pardon the meanest, but mighty men shall be mightily tormented. But let us efface this idea of terror, by introducing into its room an assurance, that they who by their authority keep back many from sin, and by their example turn many to righteousness, shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.

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